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Regulating the social media for global relationships

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Abstract

The emergence of information and communications technology has opened a global platform for communication, causing lots of changes especially redefining the identity of many nations across borders. The presence of western power is becoming prominent while values and general way of life are being globally defined by the western culture. There is proof that the social media in this age are driving these changes faster than imagined. Consequently, the social media poses lots of challenges on a global level because of the differences that exist especially among the cultures. There is therefore a pressing need for some forms on the social media to protect the identity of nations, ensure security across borders and prevent nation-to-nation harassment and discrimination. This paper therefore using the Blake's prototype proposes ways to ensure social media regulations and also identifies the possible challenges that could be faced in regulating social media network.

Keywords: Social media, global relationship, prototype, information and communications technology, Internet.

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1. Introduction

In the era of information and communication technology (ICT), it is pertinent to identify with the drastic changes technology has brought to communication in the world. These changes have no doubt resulted in societal changes not just locally but across the world. These changes include ease in communication process with immediate feedback and improved services among others. Salman et al. (2014) identifies 'perceived usefulness' and 'personal factors' as the driving factors responsible for the increased usage of ICT.

While noting that technology is important in the lives of many in the world, education, the relevance of ICT, will increase for years to come. According to United Nations, 'the development of ICTs enables businesses and individuals to communicate and engage in transactions with other parties electronically, instantaneously and internationally' (European Union, 2013, p. 1). Stressing the problems attributed to ICT, United Nations notes that these problems 'gives rise to a variety of legal and regulatory issues for policymakers, from the validity of electronic methods of contracting and the security risks associated with them, to concerns over cybercrime and the ability to protect intellectual property rights online'. For this reason, it is pertinent to note that the regulation of the Internet is important because 'media control the information resources individuals require, media typically have more power but, with the proliferation of mobile ICTs, that power is being challenged. ICTs allow individuals more control over their interactions with media-provided information' (Maxim, 2014, p. 274).

This interaction is mostly known and recognised through the social media application platforms. These applications seem to increase drastically as the inventors of these applications continue to come up with features that attract users and encourage the sharing of information through diverse forms. Neumayer, Raffl and Bichler (2009) affirm 'The emergence of social software and the new perception and use of the Internet promise to enable decentralised actions, a range of possibilities to share and exchange information open and free of charge, to collaborate equally and to foster intercultural understanding and participation'. This increase is being embraced all over the world with the drastic increase of social media users as different social media applications continue to roll out in large numbers.

According to Farhangi, Abaspour, Farahani and Ghaseni (2014), 'Social media, as opposed to traditional media, have a high potential to transfer a great bulk of information to people like any other society' (p. 41). With this increase comes cyber bullying, fraud and different forms of harassment. This form of misuse therefore calls for a form of regulation of the Internet especially the social media. This paper while analysing the uses, and impact of the social media propose the use of Blake's (1997) prototype in seeking ways the social media can be regulated.

2. Internet Definition

As described by Thiemann, Fleming and Mueller (2012), 'the telecommunication technology used by convergent technologies is the Internet; the devices themselves are computers which come in various, rapidly evolving guises – PC, notebook, mobile phone, smart phone, pad, etc.' (p. 3)

> *Continued dramatic improvements in computer memory and processing speed per unit of cost led to steady increase in affordability and ubiquity of computers. Combined with breakthroughs in storage technology, this made it increasingly possible and desirable to capture and store information, entertainment and other forms of valuable information and content in digital form. This digitization, in turn, made it easier to reuse, repurpose, manipulate and combine this content, anywhere at any time, for the specific purposes of the user, through a variety of electronic means, often in combination. At the same time, steady and substantial increases in telecommunications bandwidth, fuelled by the widespread deployment of fiber optic cables, satellites and wireless technologies, made it easier and cheaper to share*

information globally and to communicate instantaneously at long distances. These new technologies and the optimism they engendered about their economic and social potential, led to an extraordinarily dynamic period of innovation, investment and growth in the mid-to-late 1990s. (Nag, 2011, p. 56)

3. Social Media Usage Growth

Social media is used to describe an array of new Web 2.0 platforms. The social media platform has flourished with the existence and development of ICT worldwide. 'These social networking sites and social media are just some of the technologies that have flourished during the popularisation of the web' (Martins & Bavel, 2013, p. 6). The social media sites have been popularised with numerous benefits such as diverse individuals, groups and organisations that use these public sphere for networking and other profitable means. Rabia and Aboul (2015) note 'Social media provides a space for individuals, especially the youth, to participate in the act of utilisation as well as in the construction and sharing of ideas, knowledge and culture' (p. 22). Das and Sahoo (2011) affirm 'People join social networking sites because it gives them an opportunity to express their views, a feel of independency and self-esteem'.

4. Social Media History

The idea of a social media platform originated from the drive for organisations to provide a form of communication, participation and entertainment for their consumers (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Six Degress.com was the social media network first created in 1997. This medium provided a platform for users to create their personal profile and associate with other users in their social networks by sending messages (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, pp. 3–6). Classmates.com social networking site enable class mates to interact. SixDegree.com was not effective as users complained that the platform was limited and therefore did not provide them with a variety of activities to engage in. As a result of this limitation, the social media cite was closed in 2000. Furthermore, a number of other popular social media technologies such as the blogging platforms LiveJournal and Blogger (both in 1999), the wiki-based Encyclopedia Wikipedia (2001), the social bookmarking service Delicious (2003, formerly del.icio.us), the SNSs MySpace (2003) and Facebook (2004) and the microblogging service Twitter (2004) made their debuts. As adoption of these technologies grew, social media also grew. This intense growth started from 2002 (Library of Parliament, 2012, p. 1). As they continue to increase, these different social media networks create a variety of contents and functions that encompasses all sectors of the public. For instance, Classmates.com was used to form ties with former school friends, Friendster is to keep in touch with lost friends, MySpace was created as a platform to make friends but has now evolve into a music platform and Flickr in 2004 is used for sharing photos, blogs and tags.

The use of social media technologies—such as blogs, wikis, social networking sites, social tagging and microblogging—is proliferating at an incredible pace. Lots of factors have been responsible for the growth of the social media. The Library of Parliament (2012) believes that increasing availability of broadband, software tool, development of powerful computers, mobile devices, the rapid use of the social media by young people and increased affordability of these technological devices have all contributed to the growth of social media network.

5. The Internet Change

Since the out bust of the operation of the Internet, there have been diverse authors scattering opinion about through academic writing. This practise has continued to spread among academia as the Internet also continues to expand. This is because the Internet has brought more problems and unexpected challenges.

The uses of the Internet according to some other authors have drawn attention to the benefits this big world of space tends to provide. Thiemann et al. (2012) confirm that costs have fallen because of the sustained advances in transport technology and, more dramatically, in digital ICT. This medium encourages international communication and, therefore, could serve as a threat to the abuse and disregard for the culture of another.

However, its uses for negative purpose seem to outweigh the positive. The reason Internet use is becoming a societal problem is because it is a platform that connects world communication, individual and all forms of human communication. On the other hand, it tends to make communication easy and faster. The sad thing is that as the platform which almost all society and individuals belong to, it exposes all users to unwanted circumstances. Some of these circumstances include but not limited to cyber bulling, harassment and fraud.

Consequently, Watson and Hagen (2015) affirm 'citizens could potentially place themselves, or others, in danger of physical or social harm as a result of the diffusion of false information, otherwise referred to as misinformation' (p. 147). This threat may come to light during situations where individuals are interacting with others in a group setting (e.g., through a social networking site), where through their interactions they are able to influence each other. According to Trottier and Fuchs (2015), 'Social media' like Facebook or Twitter have become tremendously popular in recent years. Their popularity provides new opportunities for data collection by state and private companies, which requires a critical and theoretical focus on social media surveillance'. (p. 113)

According to Adu, Alese and Adewale (2014), 'threats to Online Social Networks (OSN) are so pervasive that even academic community has not been able to provide or even suggest a holistic approach to curb the crimes often associated with internet with particular emphasis on social networks' (p. 22). Although social media platforms are opening up opportunities for majority especially in the business world and also help up-coming artists for the purpose of branding, but these new open opportunities are also raising serious concerns.

However, efforts to expand on identity protection have not yield any success as users continue to share personal issues on these sites as social media sites also continue to create special features on these platforms that allow for personal details to be shared (Adu, Alese & Adewale, 2014, p. 1).

Providing more analysis of the freedom that exists on the social media network, Isabella and Maya (2010) note that no law is being broken because materials posted on social media platforms can be shared by another. This is an act that is considered lawful because the material is not said to be 'copied' but 'shared'.

On the other hand, social media sites are becoming a threat to human privacy, accepting strangers as friends and profile hijacking, for example, 'Ron Bowles, an online security consultant, stunned everyone in 2010 by posting personal details of 100 million Facebook users online. Bowles used a program to scan 500 million Facebook profiles and realise they were not hidden by privacy settings' (Das & Sahoo, 2011, p. 224), affecting face-to-face relationship and affecting work productivity.

6. Theoritical Framework

6.1. British culturals studies

This British cultural studies focus on 'the mass media, and their role in promoting a hegemonic worldview and a dominant culture among various subgroups in a society' (Baran & Davis, 2009). The social media platform is dominated with contents that represent diverse culture especially the culture identified with the west. This has exposed social media users to insecurity online and the culture of others which in turn dominate their original cultural identity. The danger posed by the social media calls for a need for the social media to be regulated.

6.2. Regulating the social media

The issue of regulation of the social media platform has always been a controversial one for many in the large society. First, this is because the operation of the social media in a wider scope involves inter-border form of communication. This is one of the reasons this platform is difficult to regulate. Since different countries have different culture, meaning is likely to be subjective in relation to the culture or norm of the society. But most significantly, while noting that the electronic media is the most difficult medium to regulate, Blake (1997) stress that this difficulty arise from the fact 'the electronic media are solely dependent on the use of air waves, which are public property' (p. 265). Blake (1997) therefore proposed a prototype for social media regulations. The regulations of the social media will be discussed suggesting this prototype for regulation.

1. Presently, media professionals and journalist in practise have ethical code of conducts guiding their actions as journalist. Blake (1997) therefore propose that the regulation and monitoring of the social media be left in the hands of media professionals who are capable of ensuring that messages that would disrupt the peace of the nation be avoided (p. 262).
2. He also noted 'Government and Training private tertiary institutions should train media personnel for a fee they will pay' to make sure that they monitor social media messages to ensure well-being of all and societal peace. In order to get the right persons to do the job of providing different ways of regulating the platform, human resources that are well trained is important. With this purpose or need fulfilled, the ability to provide the proper regulation will be achieved (Blake, 1997, p. 262). It is easier for people who own and are comfortable in an environment that is theirs to regulate.
3. Majority of the social media messages are distributed by international bodies such as the western world are more than we distribute in Africa. As a result of this information, imbalance occurs and cultural imperialism increases while the effect of globalisation is lost in the process. The first thing or action is for the government to provide a regulatory body to control social media contents that come into Nigeria (Participatory culture).

6.3. Creating awareness and educate social media users

Social media awareness is necessary for users especially the young generation who are termed avid users of these social networks (Clinton, Purushotma, Robison & Weigel, n.d., p. 12).

Young people are both at the core of these emerging technologies as they use them the most, but they are also at risk. 'For some adolescents, these platforms have become a way to advertise their own selves and to declare their identity. As with any other social problem or threat to young people in society, banning access to these sites is not the best solution. Young internet users are often intelligent enough to find new ways of accessing SNS. As suggested by the European Network and Information Security Agency, more awareness-raising and educational campaigns highlighting safe usage of SNS are needed'. It is therefore important that people learn how to manage their online data.

This awareness includes helping young users understand how the social media shape their perception and also understand the possible risk and danger that could be encountered in the social media network. It is believed 'Social media surveillance monitors converging social activities of humans in their converging social roles on social media platforms in order to exert actual or potential violence' (Trottier & Fuchs, 2015, p. 125).

7. State regulation

Trottier and Fuchs (2015) work towards a theoretical model of social media surveillance in the contemporary society

- Social media surveillance is a techno-social process in which human actors make use of surveillance technologies for monitoring human activities on social media. They can make use of various

technologies for this purpose: One of them is the so-called deep packet inspection Internet surveillance.

8. Self-regulation as a result of integrated sociality and integrated role

- 'This means that social media like Facebook are social spaces in which social roles tend to converge and become integrated in single profiles' (Trottier & Fuchs, 2015, p. 125)

9. Checks in work place using the faer factor

- Employees are to be controlled by using the threat of disciplinary action and the announcement that their online behaviour is being monitored (Trottier & Fuchs, 2015, p. 126).
- 'The idea is to monitor social media content and behaviour in order to identify potential offenders so that their future behaviour can be prevented by disciplinary action on the part of the state and that actual offenders can be brought to trial'.

10. The problem of regulation

Trottier and Fuchs (2015):

There is also the danger that social media surveillance conducted by the police is especially directed towards groups that already face discrimination in Western societies, like immigrants, people of colour, people of Arabic or African background, the poor, the unemployed or political activists, and that thereby stereotypes and discrimination are deepened and reified. Thus, membership in a targeted group as well as other kinds of disadvantage becomes a dominant factor in determining future negative social outcomes.

11. Language use and drastic change

Words generally are interpreted in the subjective. This means that words and concepts are defined based on the understanding or interpretation of individual. There are lots of factors that determine our interpretation of the world around us and situations around us. This is not just restricted to our background but also our environment and our culture.

12. Conclusion

With the drastic development and increase in the use of ICT across the world, it is obvious that there is no end to its use. New applications and software continue to erupt on the ICT platform in order to satisfy human needs that are generated to societal development. Although ICT has created a platform for so many activities to be performed on the internet, the different social media applications seem to be increasing. With the increase in use especially by the young people in the society, there is high exposure to social media harassment, cyber-bullying and fraud among others. Although the social media has also recorded positive impact especially in the area of business promotion, publicity and awareness for those in the limelight, there is no doubting that the negative impact is something that should be checked. This is because the social media platform operates based on a global form of interaction. Some people feel that checking or regulating the medium is an infringement on the right of the public. This is because majority recognise this platform as where they have the opportunity to express their opinion about issues thereby becoming part of the development they desire in a small or large community.

On the other hand, the issue of regulation has become challenging for the government and individual providers of these sites. This is mainly because the freedom of the public will be affected as the public sphere becomes affected. It is also pertinent to consider the subjective nature when it

comes to the interpretation of meanings by different people with regards to their culture and meaning.

Efforts, however, have been made on the side of government and the application providers themselves. There is need to seek out other ways in order to ensure fairness, avoid discrimination and ensure especially with regards to the importance of globalisation.

Acknowledgment

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